

# FOR PRINCE'S CONCERT, IT'S A REIGN OF ROCK: Singer Gambles With the ...

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*Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File); Feb 20, 1985;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1989)

pg. 11

## FOR PRINCE'S CONCERT, IT'S A REIGN OF ROCK

*Singer Gambles With the Audience,  
Opens His Six-Show Forum Series  
With an Eccentric, Ambitious Performance*

By RICHARD CROMELIN

When a rock artist makes a movie, it's usually to express things that can't be conveyed in mere songs and concerts. Prince's movie, "Purple Rain," however, is a hoary melodrama that pales next to the eccentric, chancy, ambitious show the singer offered Monday at the Forum, where he attempted to transform inner turmoil into galvanizing rock spectacle.

You can say one thing for "Purple Rain": It did the job of making Prince a huge star. Of course, all he really needed to do was put himself up there for all to see. Once the mainstream audience got a load of this seductive sexual renegade and his state-of-the-heart neo-gospel electro-funk music, it didn't take long for them to join the core following that had been with him all along.

He now commands a strikingly diverse audience that cuts across age, race, social and gender divisions (the celebrity side Monday included Elizabeth Taylor in the front row).

Under the circumstances, Prince could have gotten away with a safe run-through of the

"Purple Rain" sound track and other assorted hits. Instead, he took the risk of losing his audience as he filled the arena with an interior dialogue that was as fascinating as it was indulgent.

Monday's concert (the first of six sold-out shows at the Forum) started straightforward enough, opening with "Purple Rain's" hyped-up benediction "Let's Go Crazy" and moving into a series of songs from "1999," the 1982 album that set him up for his move into the stratosphere.

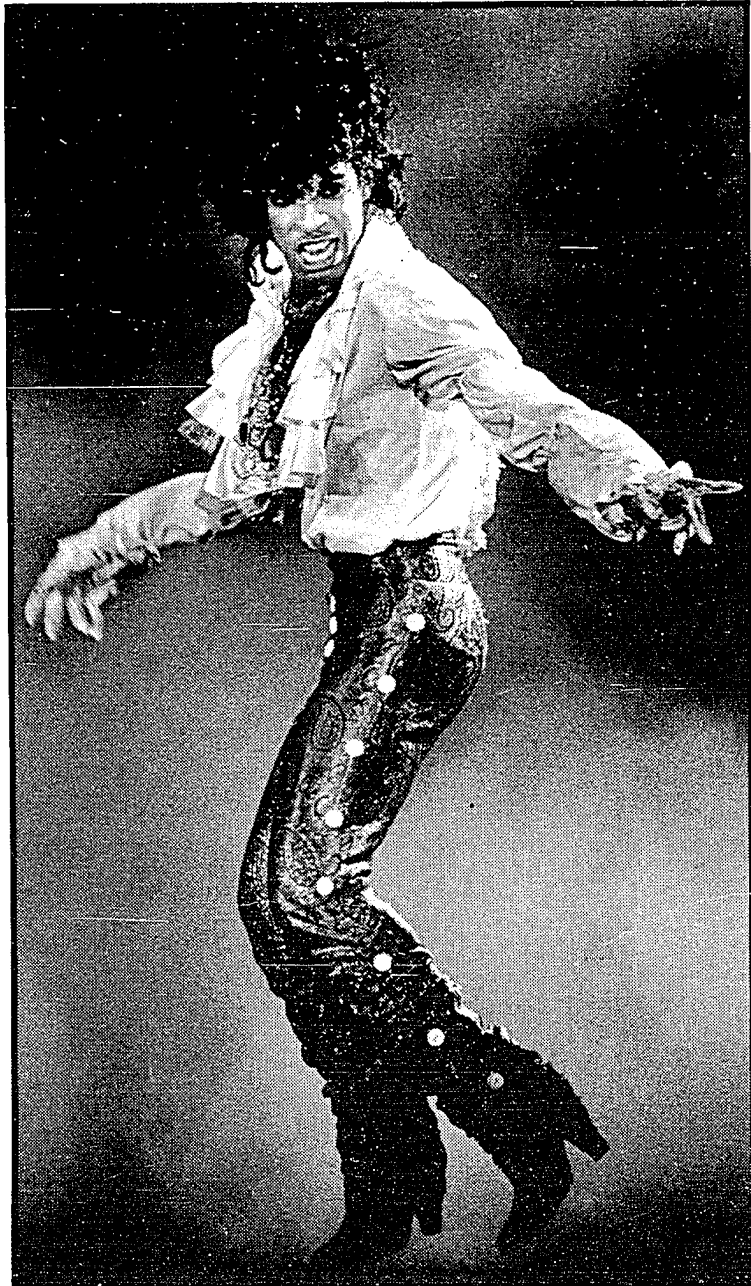
Embodying elements of James Brown, Little Richard and Jimi Hendrix, the brocade-clad dynamo belied his delicate appearance with some moves that should go right into the rock hall of fame. In the best one, he made a diving swipe at the mike stand and hit the floor in time to catch it and keep on singing.

Then it got strange.

The stage darkened while the drummer hammered out a military tattoo. A couple mounted a platform and gazed at flashing abstract images as if watching TV, then embraced and reclined. Tattered curtains hanging from

*Please see PRINCE, Page 10*

GARY FRIEDMAN / Los Angeles Times



*Sporting a punk-style coiffure, actress Elizabeth Taylor, left, a front-row spectator, applauds enthusiastically and clutches a rose thrown to her by Prince during his Monday night concert at the Forum, the first in a series of six.*



# PRINCE

*Continued from Page 1*

the ceiling waved in a breeze. Chirping birds and a faint glow created a sunrise atmosphere. Prince reappeared, sitting at the piano and singing a smoldering falsetto ballad.

Then he spoke of a "fierce battle," and admonished, "Love one another. . . . Do you believe in love?" All of a sudden we were part of a crisis-of-conscience psychodrama as Prince teased and flirted with the audience, struggled with temptation, looked heavenward and talked to an angry God, blamed us for making him bad, and contemplated the nature of love and lust and of life and death. Voices boomed from the far corners as Prince moaned, "I'm so confused." He removed his shirt, stepped into a bathtub, arched his back as if jolted by an electric shock and slowly descended into the abyss.

The perplexing nature of this apocalyptic morality play was eased when Prince, in progressively more resplendent finery, brought the set to a peak with the haunting "When Doves Cry." He finished off the evening with "Purple Rain," that stately anthem of solace and cleansing.

Prince's barrage of carnal and religious imagery is sometimes cumbersome, sometimes disquieting, and at times he becomes so self-absorbed in his struggle of spirit versus flesh that he loses sight of such things as joy and spontaneity. But the payoffs are worth the risks and losses.